Peoples Temple Agricultural Mission

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Fresh start in the jungle for the city's misfits

They cut a road seven miles into the South American rain forest and then made a clearing. If you visit that clearing in the jungle you will find a little band of misfits from the streets of San Francisco trying to start a new life.

You'll find a purse snatcher feeding pigs, a shoplifter hoeing corn, a transvestite driving a tractor, a prostitute and a couple of dope addicts in the sewing shed making their own clothes. Today.

They are succeeding remarkably well, according to the Rev. Jim Jones, pastor of Peoples Temple on Geary Street and originator of this unusual experiment in human salvage.

"What I see is turning me into an environmental determinist," he said. "We take incorrigibles — people no one could handle. Down there they straighten themselves out. I don't know the explanation. With the dramatic change in environment comes a dramatic change in the person."

Life there is kibbutz-style. The transplanted San Franciscans live in cottages and eat in a messhall that they built themselves — built with lumber from the purpleheart trees they felled to make the clearing and then cut into boards with a sawmill they had brought along.

(Continued on back cover)

Debbi Touchette

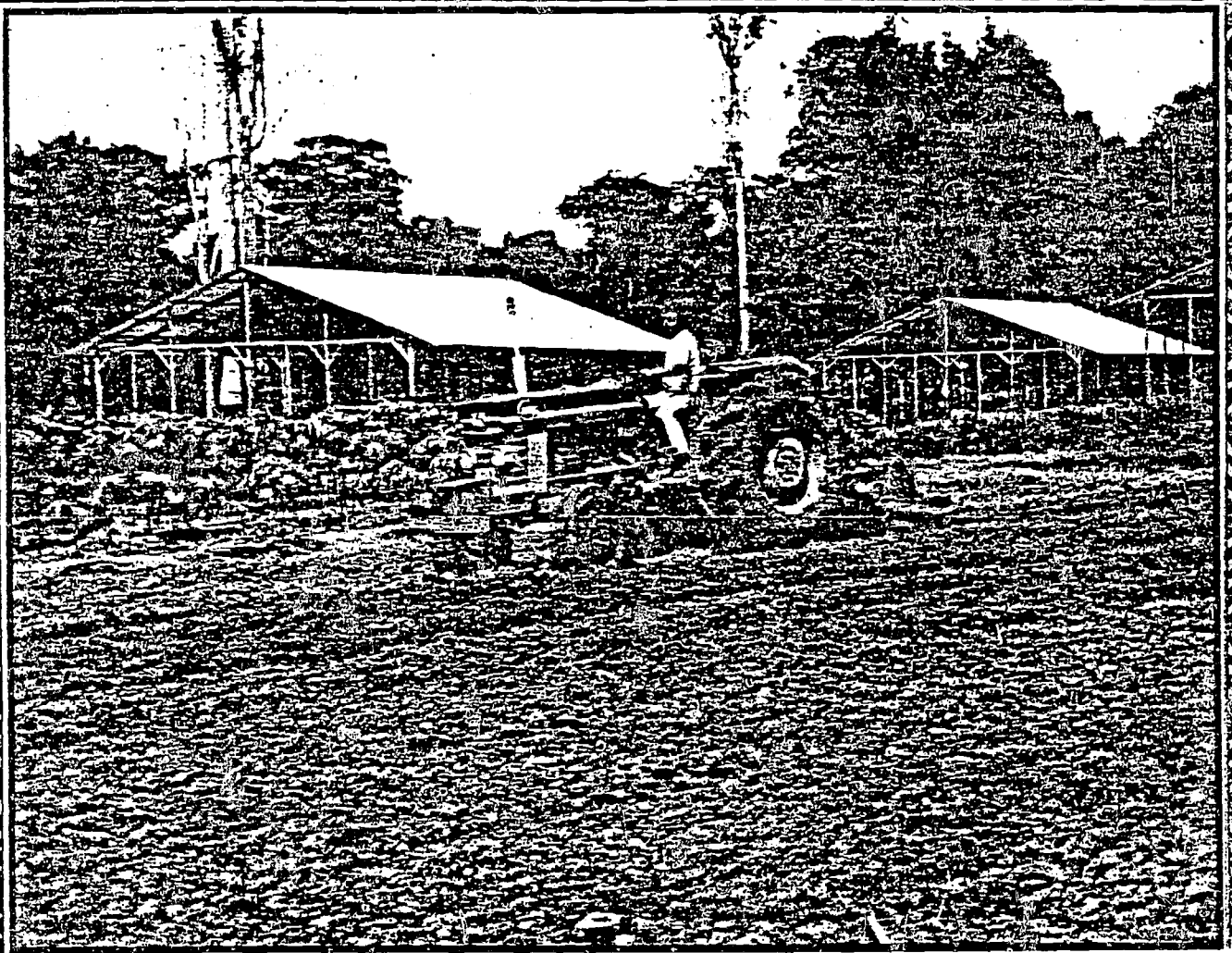
Project Director proudly displays a sweet cucumber. As coordinator she is in constant communication with local and national government officials, often hosting visiting dignitaries. Debbi is fully exercising her natural leadership for the first time here and doing an amazing job.

The Mission School

is staffed by nine teachers. Tom Grubbs, below, has a great deal of experience teaching youngsters with learning handicaps. Many of the children that come here have been failures in school because of severe emotional problems. But in this bright and healthy atmosphere they soon find that learning can be fun!

Mary *was a dedicated thief. She had organized a large ring of teen-age accomplices, who made regular raids on department stores. She was so good at lying that she fooled parents and friends for months. When the full extent of her activity was discovered, her parents decided that only a change of environment would save the young girl.*

Mary is now a competent supervisor. Her gift for leadership is channelled into supervision of many areas of mission activities that supply the workers with food. Her basically good nature has emerged, and she is learning for the first time in her life to read and write at the mission school.



Phillip is plowing ground to prepare for more crops. In the background are a few of the many crops already growing and several new buildings under construction. Phillip is also a sea captain and pilots the Mission boat on fishing trips and transporting supplies.

Flowers and birds of paradise show a flourish of color characteristic of this lush tropical zone.

Kenny, *(2nd from left) a fifteen-year-old, was the product of a violent home. He witnessed the murder of his own mother. He became a night prowler, staring into windows and entering homes. He was constantly in fights and uncontrollable.*

Now in the Mission he has become a talented mechanic and machine operator.

Fresh start

(Continued from front cover)

Three years ago the first contingent arrived. Now they have a septic tank sewage system, machine shop, school, church, rec hall. They grow corn, cassava, papaya, coconut. They raise pigs, 5,000 chickens and are introducing cattle.

"Everyone works but no one is forced," Jones said. "Pretty soon after they arrive the work ethic just makes a comeback. No one is forced to stay either. But not one person has requested to come home."

By no means have the exiles consigned themselves to jungle rot. They are cooled by the trade wind, and at night a blanket feels good. They can visit a nearby town, and some boys date native girls. By ham radio they maintain contact with the Peoples Temple here, which also sends them casettes of selected TV shows.

Jones refers to the jungle outpost simply as "the agricultural project," which is how it began. Two years as a missionary in Brazil gave him a two-fold idea.

Just north of Brazil is the little nation of Guyana, once a British plantation colony. Jones persuaded the Guyana government to let him start a model farm to show the advantages of multi-crop agriculture in the tropics. He also wanted to use the farm as a haven where San Francisco's misfits could get away from their pressures. Guyanese officials were dubious at first, but Pastor Jones is a persuasive man.

Today there are 130 problem people on the model farm and a staff of 21. The staff, which includes nine teachers, was recruited from career people who felt something was missing from their lives. The father figure was a high-powered insurance executive. An MIT man handles engineering. A Baptist minister, at 103, is launching a new career.

The problem people, besides the usual losers from the street, include the embittered son of a CIA agent, a school arsonist, a boy who cuts off cats' heads and, the youngest, a 5-year-old rated as a genius and a sociopath.

Despite the claims of near-perfect success, no one has been sent home as rehabilitated. Jones doesn't see that as necessarily how the story ends. "We don't tell people their time is up," he said. "They are free to stay as long as they feel they should be there."

He told about a new arrival who woke up to the tropic dawn, the song of exotic birds, the soft kiss of the trade wind. The young man threw out his arms and shouted, "Man, the Fillmore has seen the last of me."

News from the Farm

My own son lives and works there. He was unable to cope with life in the big city. At 14 he was a drug addict. At 17 I put him in a mental hospital for observation. Nothing helped. He was a lost cause until he met Pastor Jim Jones of Peoples Temple and went to the farm in Guyana. Now his life is completely changed. He is happy, has learned two trades and doesn't want to come back up here for quite some time. —Mrs. M.

I have a dear friend who is a member of Peoples Temple and her daughter is one of those you wrote about. We have known her since she was a child, and it broke our hearts when she turned to drugs and dropped out. A young friend got her into Peoples Temple drug program. Not long after that she was given an opportunity to take part in the overseas project. Every report has been glowing since she got there. — Laurie Ellen Henderson